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ABSTRACT

Teachers in self contained special education classes can learn to monitor and supervise parent and peer volunteers in the classroom. Teachers should remember the parents' background in teaching their children, realize the success demonstrated by nondegreed individuals, and understand the importance of scheduling and reinforcing the volunteers for their efforts. Teachers can increase their management skills by delineating the goals to parents and peers in clear, concise statements and then monitoring those goals (either directly or by instituting a self monitoring system). Preservice training on such topics as group and individual instruction, cueing and reinforcement, and data collection is also important. Scheduling could provide for understanding of roles, materials, and location of activities. Reinforcement is a vital part of any volunteer program, and requires the teacher to understand motivation and be aware of the volunteers' contributions.(CL)

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# Utilization of Parents and Peers in Self-Contained Classrooms

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# Utilization of Parents and Peers in Self-Contained Classrooms

The delivery of effective educational services to students in self-contained settings is at best a difficult task. Large class sizes and students with severe disabilities further increase the challenge faced by the classroom teacher. Many districts have sought to remediate this difficulty by hiring additional paraprofessionals and recruiting parents or peers to assist the teacher. The rationale and benefits to be gained from such approaches has been summarized elsewhere (Bricker, 1978; Northcott, 1978; Turnbull, 1978).

Although parents and peers lack the formal training, certification, and/or past experiences, there are several important considerations which may help the teacher of the self-contained classroom better utilize parents and peers. These considerations are based upon the following factors:

1. The majority of accepted teaching practices have been proven effective by non-degreed individuals, i.e., college students enrolled in psychology or education classes.

2. Parents have extensive background in teaching children.

3. Peers have been shown to be effective teachers of a variety of skills in a number of settings (Sanders and Glynn, 1977).

4. Both parents and peers can be trained in a limited amount of time to perform components of the direct teaching responsibilities found in self-contained settings (Frazer, 1979; Lillie and Trohavis, 1979).

5. Parents and peers need to be convinced that they can be useful, possess skills and can learn more skills (Duff and Swick, 1978).

6. Volunteers, whether peers or parents, need to be carefully scheduled, monitored and reinforced for their efforts.

If these considerations are taken into account it is possible to see the effect such volunteers have on a self-contained environment. The reduction of the instructor-child ratio, however, does not necessarily insure increases in the quality of instruction. The teacher is faced with a new set of problems for which he/she often has received no pre-service training and is not prepared to deal with. Often, in these cases, instructional capabilities are reduced because of the inability of the teacher to be a manager and organizer. These two roles are often overlooked and misunderstood by the teacher. The result is confusion and frustration on the part of the adults assigned to the self-contained setting.

Solutions to these problems are found in the implementation of more effective practices. This paper will discuss several of these approaches which have evolved from practical application and research in self-contained classrooms.

## Delineation of Goals to Parents and Peers

If volunteers are to function to the fullest of their capabilities, expectations must be clearly spelled out. These directions can take the form of group goal statements. In so doing, parents and peers are not expected to perform duties which the teacher does not do, i.e., changing diapers. Specific goals would vary from program to program because of aides, parents, volunteers and students involved in those classes. However, there are several goals which seem to be applicable to the majority of self-contained programs. These include consistent use of cue hierarchy, data collection, objective based small group instruction, following of scheduled activities and the maintainence of predominately positive interaction between adults and students. With proper levels of pre-training and classroom organization on the part of the teacher, the volunteer can be expected to be responsible for such goals. These goals should be formalized into clear, concise statements which are written using terminology that is understandable to non-professionals. Such statements should also form the framework for the training of competencies to the parent and paraprofessional volunteers.

## Monitoring of Goals

The use of feedback (knowledge of performance) to change the behavior of staff members has been well researched in institutions for the handicapped (Burg, Reid and Lattimore, 1979). There is also little debate that feedback facilitates acquisition of skills in all individuals (Wehman and McLaughlin, 1981). To insure that meaningful feedback is being provided to staff and volunteers a monitoring system needs to be developed by the teachers. Such monitoring should include teacher and self-monitoring systems. The implmentation of such approaches insures that the evaluation of aides and volunteers is based upon objective rather than subjective measures, thereby reducing personality difficulties which often arise.

### Teacher Monitoring

Especially during the period immediately following training, the teacher should assume primary responsibility for monitoring staff performance and providing appropriate feedback. Many of the established goals can be monitored by the teacher using a checklist and then this information can be shared with staff members at the end of each day. An example of such a checklist is found below in Figure 1. The teacher may enter "+" or "-" into the appropriate square to reflect performance levels.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

The individual sheet becomes a log of progress. The goal sheet is treated as a basis for positive discussion between the teacher and the volunteer. Other items such as positive interaction can be monitored by the teacher on a more systematic method. A classroom which has approximately three out of four interactions which are positive may be considered predominately positive. A simple method of determining this ratio is by sampling several one minute interactions, submitting each interaction to the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{positive interactions}}{\text{total interactions}} \times 100 = \%\text{ of positive}$$

then totaling the percentage of all observations (three per day is suggested) and dividing by th number of interactions. This total may then be recorded on the individual volunteer's goal sheet (Figure 1) for the day observed.

For the teacher who has more than one or two adults participating in his/her classroom, it may be helpful to develop a daily master goal sheet. This should be constructed by using an 8½ x 11 inch pinece of paper with the adult/peer names listed across the top and all of the goals for those individuals listed down the

side of the paper. Responsibilities not required of individuals are crossed out. An example of such a monitoring sheet is found in Figure 2. The sheet is laminated. The teacher uses the master goal sheet

Insert Figure 2 About Here

to tally behaviors observed of staff. This sheet may be carried on a clipboard or modified in form somewhat (4 x 8 inches), so that it may be carried in a reinforced apron or placed in a pocket. This allows continuous monitoring with limited activity interruption. At the end of the day totals are transferred onto the individual's goal sheet (Figure 1). The latter is available for review by volunteers at the end of the day or upon their return to the classroom the following day.

Self Monitoring

After the paraprofessional or volunteer has acquired skills to an acceptable level of proficiency, they may assume much of the responsibility for monitoring the established program goals on an individual basis. This approach places much of the responsibility for acceptable performance on the individual and provides the individual with a method of providing performance feedback on a consistent basis. Burg, Reed and Laltimore (1979) and Petersen

(Note 1) found self-monitoring an effective method of increasing staff performance which required limited fiscal or administrative resources.

It is suggested that the teacher continue monitoring on a random basis in an effort to provide reliability checks on each individual's monitoring. Further, it is suggested that the teacher self monitor on the same goals as staff are self monitoring. It may be beneficial to allow volunteers to monitor the teacher providing the teacher with reliability checks on his or her self monitoring.

## Training

Certainly a key to the effective utilization of parents and peers in self-contained classrooms is the preparation of these individuals for the duties of which they are expected to perform. This requires that a certain level of pre-service training must take place.

Teachers have in the past taken the stand that parents (and probably peers) can only perform limited tasks in the classroom and therefore provided only limited or no training for those volunteers. This does not seem to be a valid view of the capability of these volunteers. Teachers in self-contained programs have successfully trained mothers to perform up to six

skills for use at home (Sandler, Coren and Thurman, 1983). Multiple skill training is even more feasible when the parents participate in a direct supervision within a setting.

Some general rules that should be followed in developing such training include:

1. Training should be short and concise.

2. Training should require a minimum of teacher time.

3. Training should be competency based.

4. Competencies gained should be at the lowest level which is practical for entry into the classroom.

5. Training should be individualized to the specific roles which the individual will initially assume.

The development of a small notebook which contains pertinent information and self correcting exercises is an effective manner of preparing the volunteer for the responsibilities which will be present in the classroom. An effective format for such has been described at length by Mathews and Fawcett (1977). Ideally these activities would be paired with several observation periods. Observation can then be formalized and structured by the notebook requirements. The skills gained through such an approach should be considered as minimal and complete competency is something gained after the volunteer begins working hands on with students in the classroom. The notbook should be developed requiring

minimal reading and interpretation. Words such as contengencies or tangible, for example, should be omitted. Some suggested components of such a training package are:

1. Overview of the operation of the programs
2. Delineation of goals
3. Methods of 1-1 instruction
4. Methods of group instruction
5. Use cueing and reinforcement
6. Data collection
7. Handling behavior and medical emergencies
8. Reference guide to educational terms

Sections may be omitted for individuals who spend limited periods of time in the classroom or who choose to perform limited tasks in the classroom.

The second phase of training becomes inservice training and takes place during parents' or peers' time in the classroom. This is often a difficult task because of the variance in individual's schedules. Training should not detract from instructional time. This may require the teacher to use his/her free time for training, to set up special meetings for volunteers, and/or to develop methods of providing visual/written feedback to volunteers. One such method is discussed above in the monitoring section.

## Daily Schedule

It has been pointed out that severely handicapped and other less involved students require a structured classroom format to insure learning (Muron, 1982). A non-complex, yet often overlooked method of achieving this structure is through the use of a daily schedule (Bates, Renzaglia, and Wehman, 1981). Such an "agenda" is critical for the smooth operation of the classroom. For many self-contained classes, the daily schedule is not designed to provide information directly to students (although this may be a side benefit) but to staff, parents and volunteers.

There are several rules that should be followed when developing a daily schedule. These include:

1. It should be large enough to be read from some distance.

2. It should be positioned in such a manner as to be observable from most areas of the classroom.

3. It should be individualized for each student or group of students.

4. It should be constructed on durable material and be easily modifiable.

5. It should include the person responsible for instruction, the materials needed, or program, and the location of the activity.

A number of different manners of constructing a daily schedule have been devised which follow the above rules. Figure 3 below

is one example which has proven effective.

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Insert Figure 3 About Here

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The teacher laminates a large sheet of "tag" board and then adds and changes information on a daily basis. This allows the teacher to modify lessons, persons in charge, and/or location of activities. In effect, the daily schedule replaces the lesson plan. Aides, parents and peers are able to review their assignments upon entry into the classroom and generally need little or no verbal instruction to carry out their assigned activities.

## Reinforcement of Parents and Peers

Individuals volunteer to work in self-contained environments for a variety of reasons. This concept expands upon the commonly accepted rationale of volunteerism being based upon the wish to help those who need it (Lewis and Lewis, 1983). Self help, the development of skills, the answers to questions, the completion of credits, the pursuit of career goals, and to better understand the educational process should be included in these reasons.

The implication of this expanded outlook toward the reasons parents and peers become volunteers in self-contained

classrooms is strong. Intrinsic reinforcement gained from the experience clearly may not be sufficient to retain effective individuals as volunteers. The teacher must provide reinforcement to parents and peers which will help parents and peers to progress toward their personal goals, as well as increasing their skills in providing services to students.

One approach for a teacher to gain an understanding of what is reinforcing to the individual volunteer is to use existing or to develop reinforcement survey instruments (see Rasche, 1981). These devices allow the teacher to focus on items and activities that can serve as reinforcement for performance gains or a reward for prolonged volunteerism.

## Summary

Effective utilization of parents and peers in self-contained classrooms is possible. The burden of useful participation in the classroom rests upon the teacher. He or she must employ organizational and managerial skills which often extend beyond knowledge gained in teacher preparation programs. There are several practices which if implemented aid the teacher of the self-contained classroom utilizing volunteers. These include the clear delineation of goals, monitoring of volunteers and self, pre and in service training, daily scheduling, and the use of reinforcement with the volunteers.

The delineation of goals should be done in a clear and concise manner. These should be written without jargon and terminology. Volunteers should receive a set of these goals prior to training and placement in the classroom. Further, these goals should form the basis for training and monitoring of the parents and peers volunteering in the classroom.

Program goals should be monitored for volunteers to provide them with feedback. In so doing the individual may grow and develop during the time they are present in the self-contained classroom. As the volunteer gains in skill and confidence much of the monitoring can become self monitoring. The teacher then assumes the role of providing reliability checks to the individual's observations. A systematic monitoring system provides a positive basis for the teacher to monitor as well as providing a tool for growth for the aides, peers, and parents working in the classroom.

Volunteers generally require training if they are to function to their fullest capability in the classroom. An excellent way to provide preservice training is to develop a self correcting or programmed training manual with sections reflecting the program goals. Preservice training should be rapid and aim for only a minimum entrance criteria. After the volunteer has started work with students the teacher may then refine the skills of the volunteers through the use of further training and feedback systems.

When more than just the teacher are present in the classroom, problems in scheduling of and communicating responsibility for direct instruction often occur. These misunderstandings are easily avoided by the development of a daily classroom schedule. This schedule should be large and posted in plain sight so that all volunteers and staff members can read it and understand their assignments with limited or no explanation. This simple management tool eliminates confusion, structures the day, and may serve as a lesson plan.

Finally it should be realized the volunteers enter classrooms for a variety of reasons. The teacher needs to evaluate these and make an effort to reinforce volunteers for the performance they exhibit in the self-contained setting. In so doing effective volunteers can be retained for prolonged periods of time and will be more satisfied with their experiences.

Through effective management and organization the teacher in the self-contained setting can effectively utilize parents and peers. The majority of changes required are not difficult or complicated but their implementation results in more appropriate services to moderately and severely handicapped students.

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Figure 1

GOAL SHEET

Name: _____

| GOAL | DATE | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arrives On Time | | | | | | | | | | |
| Data Collection | | | | | | | | | | |
| Return From Break | | | | | | | | | | |
| Follows Time Schedule | | | | | | | | | | |
| Positive Interaction | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cleans Up Work Area | | | | | | | | | | |
| Organizes For A.M. | | | | | | | | | | |

Figure 2

| | Mary | Tom | Mrs. Thomas | Miss Jones | Jim | Ginny | Mr. Hilton | Mr. Smith |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arrive on time | | | | | | | | |
| Data collection | | | | | | | | |
| Return from break | | | | | | | | |
| Follow time schedule | | | | | | | | |
| Positive interaction (1) | | | | | | | | |
| (2) | | | | | | | | |
| (3) | | | | | | | | |
| Clean up work area | | | | | | | | |
| Organize for a.m. | | | | | | | | |
| Problems 1-1 | | | | | | | | |
| Problems group | | | | | | | | |
| Problems with behavior | | | | | | | | |
| Helping with others problems | | | | | | | | |
| Preparation | | | | | | | | |
| Problems with evenings | | | | | | | | |
| Problems with delay | | | | | | | | |
| Problems with reinforcement | | | | | | | | |

Figure 3

| | | 8:00<br>8:30 | 8:30<br>9:00 | 9:00<br>9:30 | 9:30<br>10:15 | 10:15<br>10:30 | 10:30<br>11:00 | 11:00<br>11:30 | 11:30<br>12:15 | 12:15<br>1:00 | 1:00<br>1:30 | 1:30<br>2:00 | 2:00<br>2:30 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MARC | Responsible<br>Program<br>Location | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| DENNIS | Responsible<br>Program<br>Location | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| JOHN | Responsible<br>Program<br>Location | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| HELEN | Responsible<br>Program<br>Location | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| CHRIS | Responsible<br>Program<br>Location | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| MIKE | Responsible<br>Program<br>Location | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| BARB | Responsible<br>Program<br>Location | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| TERRI | Responsible<br>Program<br>Location | | | | | | | | | | | | |